

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LISBON 00140 062106Z
ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PO
SUBJECT: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: WHERE THERE IS SMOKE THERE
IS NOT ALWAYS FIRE

REF: LISBON 0051

SUMMARY: AN OPPOSITION-INSPIRED MEDIA OFFENSIVE HAS BEEN
LAUNCHED TO GENERATE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS
FACING IMMINENT CRISIS. THE STYLE OF THE CAMPAIGN AND ITS
TARGETS MARK IT AS THE WORK OF RIGHT-WING MILITARY MEN AND
DISGRUNTLED CONSERVATIVE POLITICIAN. END SUMMARY

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PAGE 02 LISBON 00140 062106Z

1. TEMPEST IN TEAPOT DEPARTMENT: THE RIGHTIST OPPOSITION
MEDIA HAVE SEIZED UPON A SERIES OF RECENT EVENTS, SOME
CONTRIVED, TO FOSTER THE IMPRESSION THAT A POLITICAL CRISIS IS
IMMINENT. THE DEVELOPMENTS INCLUDE:
-- RESIGNATION OF WALTER ROSA: IT HAS BEEN PLAYED AS THE
BEGINNING OF A MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE WHICH COULD BRING
DOWN THE GOVERNMENT.

-- COSTA BRAS AFFAIR: CONSERVATIVE DAILY "O DIA" ON JAN 5
FLOATED THE STORY THAT INTERIOR MINISTER COSTA BRAS WAS THE
CHOICE OF THE "MELOANTUNISTAS" TO REPLACE SOARES AS PRIME
MINISTER IN A NEW GOVERNMENT INCLUDING MILITARY MEN AND
INDEPENDENTS.

-- RC MEETING WITH TRADE UNIONISTS: THE JAN 5 MEETING OF
REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL MEMBERS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
COMMUNIST-DOMINATED LABOR MOVEMENT HAS RAISED THE SPECTER
OF A NEW PUSH BY THE MILITARY LEFT.

2. LIGHT PIDE SENTENCES EVOKE PROTESTS: POLITICIANS ON THE
LEFT AND CENTER PROTESTED THE "LIGHT" 45-MONTH SENTENCE GIVEN
JAN 5 TO FORMER SECRET POLICE (PIDE) AGENT ANTONIO DOMINGUES
FOR THE 1961 MURDER OF COMMUNIST ACTIVIST DIAS COELHO. DEDUCTING
TIME ALREADY SERVED, COMINGUES WILL SERVE ONLY TEN MORE MONTHS.
THE DOMINGUES JUDGEMENT FOLLOWS THE LIBERATION OF SEVEN OTHER
EX-PIDE AGENTS IN RECENT DAYS.

3. COMMENT: THE STYLE OF THE MEDIA OFFENSIVE AND ITS TARGETS
MARK IT AS THE WORK OF RIGHT-WING MILITARY MEN AND CONSERVATIVE
POLITICIANS. THE PRINCIPAL ASSERTIONS--THAT A MAJOR GOVERNMENT
REORGANIZATION OR EVEN A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT IS IMMINENT--
HAVE BEEN SPECIFICALLY DENIED BY THE PRESIDENT, COSTA BRAS,
AND SPOKESMEN FOR THE PRIME MINISTER. THE STORIES THEMSELVES
ARE FOR THE MOST PART DEMONSTRABLE FALSE. THE SURFACING OF THE
ASSERTIONS, MOST OF WHICH HAVE MADE THE ROUNDS PRIVATELY IN
RECENT WEEKS, MAY REFLECT GROWING FRUSTRATIONS AMONG ELEMENTS OF
THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION.

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PAGE 03 LISBON 00140 062106Z

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